The Professional Forum

Beyond Cinderella: Ego Maturity and Attitudes Toward the Rights and Roles of Women

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An analysis of responses to the Spence-Helmreich Attitudes Toward Women Scale by the Loevinger-Wessler stages of ego development is presented in this article. The ANOVA results show a clear trend for attitude scores of women to increase toward equality and choice as their ego stage increases. The philosophical and psychological significance of viewing women's struggle for equality in the perspective of their growth and maturity is discussed, and a cognitive-developmental curriculum model developed by the author, that has successfully promoted ego and moral maturity in young women is summarized.

With the renaissance of the women's movement there has been an upsurge of interest in exploring attitudes toward the rights and roles of women in today's society (Spence & Helmreich, 1973). The studies tend to be descriptive in nature and present needed normative data collected from a wide range of samples. However, a specific research focus needs to be placed on how women's attitudes toward their rights and roles in society are related to their personal maturity. Recent work by Loevinger and Wessler, 1970, Loevinger (1976) views the achievement of personal maturity as a developmental process of ego integration. A person whose ego is on the self-protective, opportunist level, or on a conceptually simple, conforming level makes meaning out of life in a qualitatively different way than does a person who has a high level integrated ego. A person with an integrated ego searches for self-fulfillment but respects others' autonomy, values justice and idealism for herself as well as for others, copes with inner conflict and struggles for reconciliation of sex role conflicts. The conceptual complexity of a person with high ego integration allows for differentiated perceptions, multiple perspectives, existential humor and an appreciation for the paradoxes in life. Women's attitudes toward equality need to be examined in relation to ego maturity. It is the purpose of this paper to present an analysis of women's responses on the Spence-Helmreich Attitudes Toward Women Scale as classified by the Loevinger-Wessler stages of ego maturity, and to explore related implications.

Instrumentation:

The Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1973) is a standardized, psychometrically sound objective instrument designed to measure attitudes toward the rights and roles of women in contemporary society. The scale contains 55 items, each with four response alternatives reflecting vocational, educational, and intellectual roles of women, freedom and independence, dating, courtship and etiquette, sexual behavior, and marital relationships and obligations. Each item is given a score from 0 to 3, with 0 representing a response alternative reflecting the most traditional, conservative attitude and 3 the alternative reflecting the most liberal, profeminist attitude. The range of possible scores is thus from 0 to 165.

The measure of ego maturity used in this study was the Sentence Completion Test (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). It consists of 36 brief sentence stems which are spaced over three test pages. The subject writes the sentence completions she thinks are most important. Individual responses are scored within a schema which include the categories of impulse control and character

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development, interpersonal style, conscious pre-occupations, and cognitive style. Seven basic stages and three transition stages comprise the hierarchial sequence of ego development. The seven primary stages are identified as presocial, impulsive, self-protective, conformist, conscientious, autonomous, and integrated. The stems are rated individually and the protocols are then given a total rating reflecting the dominant stage usage. For purposes of analysis in this study the seven stages and three transition stages are coded on a ten point scale. Thus, the range of possible scores on the total protocol is from 1-10, with 10 representing an integrated mode of ego maturity. The essence of the ego is defined by Loevinger and Wessler as the search for coherent meanings in experience.

Sample and Procedure:

The Attitudes Toward Women Scale and the Loevinger-Wessler Sentence Completion Form were given as pre and post tests to 23 sophomore women who enrolled in a women's growth class developed by this author* during Spring, 1973, in an inner city Minneapolis public high school. The pre tests of the young women were used for analysis in this study.

Analysis of the Data:

For purposes of this study the ego maturity scores of the 23 sophomore women were split into four groups. In Table I the Loevinger stage score is paralleled with the numerical coding score, and the N within each grouping is given.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF PUPILS BY EGO MATURITY STAGE

Loevinger Stage**	I-1	I-2	I-Δ	I-Δ3	I-3/4	I-4	I-4/5	I-5	I-6
Coding Number	1 2		3 4		5 6		7 8		9 10
N	0		2		3 10		8		0

Thus, as indicated in Table I, two pupils responded to the sentence completion test at the delta or self-protective level (I-Δ and I-Δ3); three pupils responded at I-3, the conformist level; ten students responded at I-3/4, the transition stage in which a multiple perspective begins, and eight students responded at I-4 and I-4/5, the beginning stages of conscientious, complex thinking. The Spence scores on this sample of pupils ranged from 61 to 151 of the possible 165 points. The mean of the class was 109.69.

Spence and Helmreich (1973) have identified six factor loadings on the 55 Attitude Toward Women items using an image analysis technique. These six factors include:

Factor I. Vocational, Educational, and Intellectual Roles (17 items)
Factor II. Freedom and Independence (4 items)
Factor III. Dating, Courtship and Etiquette (7 items)
Factor IV. Drinking, Swearing, Jokes (3 items)
Factor V. Sexual Behavior (7 items)
Factor VI. Marital Relationships and Obligations (17 items)

A one way analysis of variance was run for the Spence-Helmreich total score and for each of the above six factors across the four groupings of ego maturity scores. Factor scores are defined by adding up the item scores within the factor. In the cases where the ANOVA was significant a Fisher LSD procedure was run to investigate pair-wise differences.

Results

The results of a one-way analysis of variance on the total scores from the Spence-Helmreich instrument as classified by the stages of the Loevinger-Wessler ego test are presented in Table II.

TABLE II
MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR THE SPENCE-HELMREICH TOTAL SCORES AS CLASSIFIED BY THE LOEVINGER-WESSLER EGO STAGES

Group	Stages I-Δ, Δ3	Stages I-3	Stages I-3/4	Stages I-4, 4/5
Mean	84.50	92.33	104.50	129.00
Standard Deviation	4.95	13.65	22.71	14.3

Analysis of Variance

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F ratio	F probability
Between Groups	3	1808.40	5.34	.008
Within Groups	19	338.72		

*The class was cotaught with Mary Mozey and Charlotte Rogers of the Minneapolis School System.
**I represents ego level.

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The data show significant differences on the Spence-Helmreich total score when the pupils are classified by the Loevinger Stage groupings. The ordering of the mean scores is as expected by stages, the mean of the attitude scale scores increases with an increase in ego stage. The equality of the variances between the scores in the stage grouping Δ, Δ3 and stage 3/4 may be questioned, but since the small variances tend to fall with the small means, the significance statement is probably conservative. Also, because the sample N is small, significant differences indicate mean differences which are fairly important. If the model is considered as four distinct populations with equal means and variances the probability of getting these results is fairly small.

An LSD Procedure was run on the analysis (and all other findings on which the F was significant). Of importance, the overriding result on this test indicates that the Loevinger-Wessler stage ego grouping 4, 4/5 responded to the Spence-Helmreich attitude items in a way which was significantly different than all the other stage responses in most instances.

Table III shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance on the Factor I scores (17 items dealing with vocational, educational, and intellectual roles) as classified by the stages of the Loevinger-Wessler ego test.

TABLE III
MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR THE SPENCE-HELMREICH FACTOR I SCORES AS CLASSIFIED BY THE LOEVINGER-WESSLER EGO STAGES

Group	Stages I-Δ, Δ3	Stage I-3	Stage I-3/4	Stages I-4, 4/5
Mean	28.50	33.33	37.90	45.25
Standard Deviation	6.36	6.03	8.13	3.62

Analysis of Variance

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F ratio	F probability
Between Groups	3	213.80	5.08	.009
Within Groups	19	42.08		

Again the findings are significant. The data in Table III indicate more variation existed between the means, themselves, than expected from the estimates of variance within the groups. The ordering of the means was also as expected, and the LSD procedure again showed stage grouping 4, 4/5 is a separate subset from all the others.

A one-way ANOVA was run on scores from Factor II (four items dealing with freedom and independence) on the Spence-Helmreich instrument as classified by the Loevinger-Wessler ego test (see Table IV). Again significant differences were evident between the means. In this analysis the Δ, Δ3 stage grouping mean scores were somewhat higher than those in stages 3 and 3/4 but lower than those in stage group 4, 4/5. The LSD procedure indicates the stage grouping 4, 4/5 is distinct from stage 3 and stage 3/4.

TABLE IV
MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR THE SPENCE-HELMREICH FACTOR II SCORES ON CLASSIFIED BY THE LOEVINGER-WESSLER EGO STAGES

Group	Stages I-Δ, Δ3	Stage I-3	Stage I-3/4	Stages I-4, 4/5
Mean	6.50	5.33	6.40	9.38
Standard Deviation	2.12	0.58	2.07	1.51

Analysis of Variance

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F ratio	F probability
Between Groups	3	18.48	5.91	.005
Within Groups	19	3.13		

One-way ANOVA results on Factor III (items focused on attitudes toward dating, courtship, and etiquette) on the Spence-Helmreich instrument as classified by the ego stages show the between group variations followed the same pattern but were not sufficiently greater than the within group variation to cause a large F ratio (see Table V). In this instance the small sample size probably caught up, or the reliability of the factor itself needs to be further examined. The order of the mean scores, however, still reflect some stage progression.

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TABLE V
MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR THE SPENCE-HELMREICH FACTOR III SCORES AS CLASSIFIED BY THE LOEVINGER-WESSLER EGO STAGES

Group	Stages I-Δ, Δ3	Stage I-3	Stage I-3/4	Stages I-4, 4/5
Mean	8.50	8.00	9.70	13.78
Standard Deviation	3.54	2.00	3.95	3.96

Analysis of Variance

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F ratio	F probability
Between Groups	3	32.91	2.31	.109
Within Groups	19	14.24		

The data in Table VI show no significant differences exist between the ego stage groups on Factor IV of the Spence-Helmreich attitude test. This factor is composed of items related to attitudes toward male/female differences in drinking, swearing, and joke telling, and consists of only three items. The author suspects the small number of items in the factor as well or the content of the items did not lend to discernable differences. The order of the means still reflects some stage changes.

TABLE VI
MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR THE SPENCE-HELMREICH FACTOR IV SCORES AS CLASSIFIED BY THE LOEVINGER-WESSLER EGO STAGES

Group	Stages I-Δ, Δ3	Stage I-3	Stage I-3/4	Stages I-4, 4/5
Mean	4.00	6.33	5.60	6.25
Standard Deviation	0.00	1.53	2.22	2.38

Analysis of Variance

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F ratio	F probability
Between Groups	3	3.12	.67	.582
Within Groups	19	4.66		

Factor V of the Spence-Helmreich instrument consists of 7 items dealing with attitudes toward sexual behavior. As indicated in Table VII, significant differences exist on this factor between the ego stages. The order of the mean scores is close to the expected. The LSD procedure indicates the trend again that the lower stages are not different and that stages 4, 4/5 are in this case distinctly different from stage 3.

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TABLE VII
MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR THE SPENCE-HELMREICH FACTOR V SCORES AS CLASSIFIED BY THE LOEVINGER-WESSLER EGO STAGES

Group	Stages I-Δ, Δ3	Stage I-3	Stage I-3/4	Stages I-4, 4/5
Mean	9.00	8.00	9.40	12.88
Standard Deviation	1.41	2.65	3.06	2.10

Analysis of Variance

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F ratio	F probability
Between Groups	3	26.73	3.87	.026
Within Groups	19	6.91		

Impressive differences exist between ego groups on Factor VI scores (17 items on attitudes on marital relationships and obligations) on the Spence-Helmreich instrument (see Table VIII). Again the ordering of the mean scores fit the predicted order by stage, and the LSD procedure showed ego stage grouping 4, 4/5 to be significantly different than all other groups.

TABLE VIII
MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR THE SPENCE-HELMREICH FACTOR VI SCORES AS CLASSIFIED BY THE LOEVINGER-WESSLER EGO STAGES

Group	Stages I-Δ, Δ3	Stage I-3	Stage I-3/4	Stages I-4, 4/5
Mean	28.00	31.33	35.50	41.88
Standard Deviation	5.66	6.51	7.01	4.52

Analysis of Variance

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F ratio	F probability
Between Groups	3	155.23	4.20	.019
Within Groups	19	36.95		

Discussion of Results:

The ANOVA data in this study indicate that a clear trend exists for attitude scores on the rights and roles of women to increase toward equality and choice as ego stage increases. This finding seems philosophically and psychologically sound. Given the definition, the essence of the ego is the search for coherent meanings in experience, cognitive movement away from stereotyped, conformist thinking toward reflective, introspective thought in which the "ought" can be differentiated from the "is" is logically accompanied by sex role attitudes which uphold the personhood of women. The more complex, more differentiated, more integrated ego can more adequately comprehend the underlying issues of justice.

The Fisher LSD procedure results indicated that the Loevinger-Wessler ego stage grouping 4, 4/5 responded to the attitude scale in ways that were significantly different than all other stage responses. That these responses form a separate subset from all the others is important. It is not until stages 4, 4/5, the conscientious ego stage and the transition stage from the conscientious to the autonomous ego, that true conceptual complexity is present. The I-4 person sees life as presenting choices, self-evaluated standards prevail and she is able to distinguish moral from esthetic standards. Interpersonal relations are cherished, and she has a clear conception of mutuality. Thus, the ability to integrate and to make meaning from experiences is qualitatively different at these ego levels than it is at the lower levels. The findings in this study reflect this relationship between ego maturity and attitudes toward equality and choice.

A limitation of this study is the absence of scores at the I-5, I-6 ego levels. The complexity and integration of the I-4, 4/5 ego stages becomes richer and more varied at the highest ego levels and men and women are truly viewed as part of a common humanity. However, it is this author's view that this level of integration and mutuality would not likely be picked up on the Spence-Helmreich scale since the items tend to stress the rights of women and are not always stated such that mutual rights are explored. For example, the item "women have an obligation to be faithful to their husbands" should be extended to ". . . as do men to their wives" to tap this mutuality. A future study needs to include a sample with

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the full range of ego maturity and an attitude instrument needs to be used which is deliberately designed to pick up all developmental levels of ego maturity. The content vs. structure questions confronting cognitive-developmental psychologists might also be touched on in this discussion. The Loevinger-Wessler scoring system attempts to tap structural complexity, not content variables. However, it seems to this author after studying the scoring system and rating hundreds of protocols that subjects at the higher ego stages do concern themselves with a different sphere of content, and the results of this present analysis of attitudes and ego level lend additional evidence. The interaction of content focus and structure of thinking needs to be further explored in ego research.

*Implications: Beyond Cinderella***

David Riesman, in a response to women seeking equality of choices, replied: "Yes, when you're as far along as men," (*Harvard Today,* Summer, 1974). Dr. Riesman is correct; however, women will not automatically develop toward higher stages of growth without the requisite interactions. Surely, the injustice calls for action. A growth curriculum, developed by this author under a joint sponsorship of the Minneapolis Public School System (Southeast Alternatives Project) and the University of Minnesota*, is a beginning approach to such a deliberate intervention. It represents an attempt to promote psychological growth in young women through the mainstream of the school — the school curriculum.

The growth course followed a seminar-practicum format in which the young women interviewed girls and women across the life span to view the process of women's growth through different ages, stages, and tasks. Seminar sessions were coupled with the field experience to further examine, reflect upon, and integrate the interviewing experience on a personal level. The students studied the interview data to perceive differences by stage of personal development. In the seminars, they also studied women figures in literature which were selected to represent the qualitative stages of growth. Most important, throughout this process the pupils continually explored the implications of their own emerging choices and personal development. In this way, there was a continuous, on-going three-way connection between field interview data, works of literature, and an examination of "the self." The results of the multiple assessments in the curriculum study indicate that the experimental course was a successful beginning toward promoting movement on the developmental stages of growth in the women students. For a comprehensive review of the sample, rationale, curriculum, evaluation and analysis see Erickson, 1977.

During this transition period in our society, when role assignments continue to put a 'lid' on women's development — if we are to move beyond Cinderella, beyond conformity and stereotyped thinking — we need to further develop growth courses to deliberately encourage psychological maturity for all women.

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**Segments of this curriculum/evaluation section have appeared in Erickson, 1974, 1975, 1977.

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